

SENATE BILL 314 A BAD IDEA FOR MICHIGAN

Senate Bill 314 would exempt landfills with gas recovery systems from Michigan's 18 year old ban on the disposal of yard waste in landfills. This would mean that almost all of landfills in the State could accept yard waste. It would also mean that millions of cubic yards of grass and leaves that are now being used to produce a valuable soil amendment, and an environmentally safe fertilizer, will find their way back in to a dump without any guarantee that more methane will be captured, or more electricity will be generated.

If this bill passes the compost industry will be destroyed. The thousands of people who work in the industry will lose their job. Why the dire prediction it's simple. Most of the haulers have their own landfills. If you can keep the material, and the associated revenue, in house why would you split it with a compost facility? Most of the compost companies are small businesses. They are not strong enough to weather the disruption this bill will cause. The passage of this bill will enrich one company (Granger) at the expense of 120 others.

All of this hardship for an electrical generation program that is not new, landfills have been doing a variation of this for decades, but which has only become economical of late. The economics had nothing to do with a shortage of methane. The economic draw back was the cost to produce the electricity. Now, because the State mandates that utilities generate a portion of their electricity from renewable sources, and requires the utilities to pay a premium for that electricity the program is economical. Even so to date even the facilities with gas collection, and electrical generating capacity flare off much of the gas which is captured.

As an aside. It is ironic that grass to gas has become economical because the State has mandated that the power companies purchase power created from alternative sources. Much the same way the State mandated yard waste diversion 18 years ago. These people are making an investment with the belief that the State won't change the policy. In the same way we made our investment 18 years ago.

The initial goal of the diversion legislation in 1990 was to preserve landfill space for things that needed to be encapsulated. It has worked. I know of no new landfills which have been sited since the ban was in place. Fully 20 % of a municipal waste stream consists of yard waste. In southeastern Michigan, where I operate and know the market, this can mean more than 1,000,000 cubic yards of material a year are diverted, away from landfills extending their lives for years.

The landfill ban has been a popular law in the State. The residents of the State are proud of the material they have diverted. Initially the enthusiastically separated the yard waste from their other trash. They suffered through the transition from plastic to paper bags without complaint. The compliance rate nears 100%. They understood then, as they understand now that yard waste has no business in a landfill.

Even with the enthusiastic support of the people in Michigan for recycling we lag far behind the other States in our region. So much so that the Governor has tasked the DEQ, and Director Wyatt to develop a comprehensive plan to increase recycling in Michigan. If you put yard waste (the low hanging fruit) back into the landfill it would be impossible for any plan of the Directors to show results that the governor has requested.

Finished compost is becoming an increasingly valuable product. In a general sense it has become accepted by landscapers, home gardeners, organic farms and MDOT.

But there is a lot more we are finding that it can be used for.

The State has banned the use of phosphates in residential fertilizer, because it is the phosphates that are feeding the algae blooms in Lake Erie. The scientific community is exploring whether the phosphates in finished compost are more stable than other forms of phosphate. They believe that the phosphates and other nutrients in compost will not run off into the lake. This will give the homeowner, and ultimately the farmer, access to phosphates and other nutrients without impacting open waters.

There is also huge childhood lead poisoning problem in the State. In Detroit it was estimated that one in five children suffered from lead poisoning. The numbers were similar in Kalamazoo, Benton Harbor, Grand Rapids and Flint. It is estimated that 40% of the source pollution that effects our children comes from the ground around their homes. The lead is in the ground as the result of years of leaded gasoline, smelters and other industrial air pollution. Now science is showing that if you amend lead contaminated soils with a compost blend it alters the lead molecule from one that a child's body sees as calcium and absorbs to one the body sees as foreign and passes through. In effect using compost will be a very inexpensive solution to a very serious problem.

If this bill passes we will get some expensive electricity we don't need at a very high cost to our environment and our children.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify

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